

MISS MINERVA and WILLIAM GREEN HILL

By FRANCES BOYD CALHOUN
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CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

"Maurice loves you, too"—she hoped to conciliate him; "he says you are the brightest kid in town."

"Kid," was the scornful echo, "cause he's so big and tall, he's got to call me a kid. Well, he's just a-wantin' hisself lovin' me; I don't like him an' I ain't a-goin' to never like him, an' soon as I put on long pants he's got to get 'bout the worstes' lookin' he ever did see."

"Say, does you kiss him like you does me?" he asked presently, looking up at her with serious, unsmiling face.

She hid her embarrassment in a laugh. "Don't be foolish, Billy," she replied. "I'll bet he's kissed you more'n fifty hundred times."

"There's Jimmy whistling for you," said Miss Cecilia. "How do you two boys make that peculiar whistle? I would recognize it anywhere."

"Is he ever kiss you yet?" asked the child.

"I heard that you and Jimmy whipped Ed Brown because he imitated your own particular whistle. Did you?"

"How many times is he kiss you?" asked Billy.

"The young girl put her arm around him and tried to settle his little body against her own."

"I'm too big, anyway, for your real sweetheart," she said. "Why, by the time you are large enough to marry I should be an old maid. You must have Frances or Lina for your sweetheart."

"An' let you have Maurice!" he sneered.

She stopped to lay her flushed cheek against his own.

"Honey," she softly said, "Maurice and I are going to be married soon; I love him very much and I want you to love him too."

He pushed her roughly from him.

"An' you've 'celved me all the time," he cried, "an' me a-lovin' you better'n anybody I ever see since I's born. An' you a Sunday-school teacher! I ain't never a-goin' to trust nobody no mo'. Good-by, Miss Cecilia."

She caught his hand and held it fast. "I want you and Jimmy to be my little pages at the wedding, and wear dear little white satin suits all trimmed with gold braid"—she tried to be enthusiastic and arouse his interest; "and Lina and Frances can be little flower-girls and we'll have such a beautiful wedding."

"Jimmy an' Lina an' Frances can be all the pages an' flower-girls, an' brides an' grooms they wants to, but you can't 'rpe me in," he scornfully replied. "I's done with you an' I ain't never goin' to have me no' sweet-heart long 's I live."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Closer Than a Brother.

It was a bad, rainy day. Jimmy and Billy were playing in Sarah Jane's cabin, she, however, being in happy ignorance of the fact. Her large stays, worn to the preaching the night before, were hanging on the back of a chair.

"Ain't I glad I don't have to wear no corset when I puts on long pants?" remarked Billy, pointing to the article.

"Ain't that a big one? It's twice 's big 's Aunt Minerva's."

"My mama wears a big 'corset, too," said Jimmy; "I like fat women 'nother night better 'n lean ones. Miss Minerva's 'bout the skinniest woman they is; when I get married I'm going to pick me out the fattest wife I can find, so when you set in her lap at night for her to rock you to sleep you'll have a soft place to put your head, while she sings to you."

"The major—he's mo' plump enough for two," said Billy, taking down the stays and trying to look them around him.

"It sho' is big," he said; "I believe it's big 'nough to go 'round both of us."

"Le's see if it ain't," was the other boy's ready suggestion.

He stood behind Billy and they put the stays around both little bodies, while, with much squeezing and giggling, Billy hooked them safely up the front. The boys got in front of Sarah Jane's one looking-glass and danced about laughing with glee.

"We're like the twines what was growed together like mamma read me 'bout," declared the younger child.

Presently they began to feel uncomfortable, especially Jimmy, whose fat, round little middle was tightly compressed.

"Here, unhook this thing, Billy, and le's take her off," he said. "I'm 'bout to pop open."

"All right," agreed his companion. He tugged and pulled, but could get only the top and bottom hooks unclipped; the middle ones refused to budge.

"I can't get these here hooks to come loose," Billy said.

Jimmy put his short, fat arms around him and tried his hand, but with no better success. The stays were such a snug fit that the hooks seemed glued.

"We sho' is in a fix," said Billy gloomily; "look like God all time let us git in trouble."

"You think of more fool stunts to do, William Hill, than any boy they is," cried the other; "you all time want to get us hooked up in Sarah Jane's corset and you all time can't get nobody loose. What you want to get us hooked up in this thing for?"

"You done it 'yoself," defended the boy in front with rising passion. "Squeeze in, Jimmy, we jes' boun' to git out this 'ere somebody finds it out."

He backed the other child close to the wall and pressed so hard against him that Jimmy screamed aloud and began to pound him on the head with his chubby fists.

Billy would not submit tamely to any such treatment. He reached his hand behind him and gave the smaller boy's cheek a merciless pinch. The fight was on. The two little boys, laced up tightly as they were in a stout pair of stays, pinched and scratched, and kicked and jerked. Suddenly Billy, leaning heavily against Jimmy, threw him flat on his back and fell on top of him.

Bennie Dick, sitting on the floor, had up to this time watched the proceedings with an interested eye; now, thinking murder was being committed, he opened his big, red mouth and emitted a howl that could be heard half a mile. It immediately brought his mother to the open door. When she saw the children squirming on the floor in her only corset, her indignation knew no bounds.

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corset. "I all gotta go right to y' all's mamas an' Miss Minerva dis very minute. I low dey 'll settle yo' bashes. Don't y' all know dat Larroes ketch meddlers?"

CHAPTER XIX.

Twins and a Sis.

Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Black were sitting on Miss Minerva's veranda talking to her, and Lina and Frances were in the swing with Billy. The attraction proved too great for Jimmy; he impolitely left a disconsolate little visitor sitting on his own porch while he jumped the fence and joined the other children.

"Don't you all wish you could see Mrs. Brown's new twines?" was his greeting as he took his seat by Billy.

"Where 'd she get 'em?" asked Frances.

"Doctor Sanford tooken 'em to her last night."

"He mustered found 'em in a holler stump," remarked Billy. "I know, 'cause that 's where Doctor Shackles foot finds aller 't Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Perny Pearline's, an' me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln been lookin' in ev'ry holler stump we see ever since we's born, an' we ain't never foun' no baby 't all, 'cause can't nobody but jes' doctors fin' 'em. I wish he 'd s'give 'em to Aunt Minerva 'tiddier Mrs. Brown."

"I wish he 'd bringed 'em to my mama," said Frances.

"I certainly do think he might have given them to us," declared Lina, "and I'm going to tell him so, too. As much money as father has paid him for doctor's bills and as much old, mean medicine as I have taken just to 'commode him; then he gives babies to everybody but us."

"I'm awful glad he never give 'em to my mama," said Jimmy, "cause I never could had no more fun; they'd be struck right under my nose all time, and all time put their mouth in everything you want to do, and all time meddlin'. But I can't fool me 'bout twines. But I wish I could see 'em! They so weakly they got to be hatched in a incubator."

"What 's that?" questioned Frances.

"That 's a something what you fatches chickens and babies in when they's delicate and ain't got 'nough breath and ain't got their eyes open and ain't got no feathers on," explained Jimmy.

"Reckon we can see 'em?" she asked.

"See nothing!" snuffed the little boy. "Ever since Billy let Mr. Algernon Jones whack Miss Minerva's beau we can't do nothing at all 'bout grown folks 't stuck right under your nose. I'm jes' cramped to death."

"When I'm a mama," mused Frances, "I hope Doctor Sanford 'll bring me three little twines, and two Maltese kittens, and a little Japanese, and a monkey, and a parrot."

"When I'm a papa," said Jimmy, "I don't want no babies at all, all they 's good for is jus' to set 'round and yell."

"Look like God 'd sho' be busy a-makin' so many babies," remarked Billy.

"Why, God don't have none 'a the trouble," explained Jimmy. "He 's just got him a baby factory in heaven like the chair factory and the canning

factory down by the railroad, and angels jus' all time make they arms and legs, like niggers do at the chair factory, and all God got to do is jus' glue em together, and stick in their souls. God got 'bout the easiest job they is."

"I thought angels jes' clam' the golden stair and play their harps," said Billy.

"Ain't we going to look sweet at Miss Cecilia's wedding?" said Frances, after a short silence.

"I 'll betcher I 'll be the cutest kid in that church," boasted Jimmy contentedly. "You coming, ain't you, Billy?"

"I gotter go," answered that jittered again, gloomily, "Aunt Minerva ain't got nobody to leave me with at home. I jes' wish she 'd git married."

"Why would n't you be a page, Billy?" asked Lina.

"Cause I did n't hafta," was the snappish reply.

"I bet my mama give her the finest present they is," bragged the smaller boy; "I reckon it cost 'bout a million dollars."

"Mamma gave her a handsome cut-glass vase," said Lina.

"It looks like Doctor Sanford would 've give Miss Cecilia those twines for a wedding present," said Frances.

"Who 's that little boy sitting on your porch, Jimmy?" asked Lina, noticing for the first time a lonely-looking child.

"That 's Leon Tipton, Aunt Ella's little boy. He just come out from Memphis to spend the day with me and I 'll be awful glad when he goes home; he's 'bout the stuck-up-est kid they is, and skerry! He 's 'bout the 'fraidest young un ever you see. And look at him now! Wears long curls like a girl and don't want to never get his clean clothes dirty."

"I think he 's a beautiful little boy," championed Lina. "Call him over here, Jimmy."

"Naw, I don't want to. You all 'll like him a heap better over there; he's one o' these here kids what the fuder you get 'way from 'em, the better you like 'em."

"He sho' do look lonesome," said Billy; "vite him over, Jimmy."

"Leon!" screamed his cousin, "you can come over here if you wanta."

The lonesome-looking little boy promptly accepted the invitation, and came primly through the two gates. He walked proudly to the swing and stood, cap in hand, waiting for an introduction.

"Why did n't you clam' the fence, 'stead of coming th'oo the gates?" growled Jimmy. "You 'bout the prissel-boy they is. Well, why don't you set down?"

"Introduce me, please," said the elegant little city boy.

"Introduce your grandma's pussy cats," mocked Jimmy. "Set down, I tell you."

Frances and Lina made room for him between them and soon gave him their undivided attention, to the intense envy and disgust of the other two little boys.

"I am Lina Hamilton," said the little girl on his right.

"And I'm Frances Black, and Jimmy ought to be 'shamed to treat you like he does."

"I knows a terrible skeery tale," remarked a malicious Billy, looking at Lina and Frances. "If y' all wa'n't girls I 'd tell it to you."

"We are n't any more scared 'n you, William Hill," cried Frances, her interest at once aroused; "I already know 'bout 'raw meat and bloody bones and nothing 's scarier 'n that."

"And I know 'Fe, Fi, Fo, Pum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I'll ground his bones to make me bread," said Lina.

"This here tale," continued Billy, giving his big eyes to those of the little stranger, "is one Tabernicle learnt for a speech at school. It 's all 'bout a 'oman what was buried in a graveyard with a diamond ring on her finger, an' a robber come in the night. The child's tones were guttural, thrilling and hair-raising as he glared into the eyes of the effeminate Leon, an' a robber come in the night an' try to cut it off, an' haunts was groanin' an' the win' moan 'oo-oo an'—"

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Leon could stand it no longer. "I am going right back," he cried rising with round, frightened eyes, "I am not going to sit here and listen to you, scaring little girls to death. You are a bad boy to scare Lina and Frances and I am not going to associate with you; and this champion of the fair sex stalked with dignity across the yard to the gate."

"I'm no more scared 'n nothing," and indignantly Frances hurried at his back. "You're just scared yourself."

Jimmy giggled happily. "What 'd I tell you all," he cried, gleefully. "Lina and Frances got to all time set little 'traid cats 'tween 'em," he snorted.

"It 's just like I tell you, he 's the scisseyest boy they is; and he don't care who kiss him neither; he'll let any woman kiss him what wants to."

The children looked at each other in consternation when they perceived their loss.

"What we goin' to do now?" asked Billy.

"If this ain't just like Billy, all time got to perpose to clam' a ladder and all time got to let the ladder get loose from him," growled Jimmy. "We done cooked a goose egg, this time. You got us up here, Billy, how you going to get us down?"

"I did n't, neither."

"Well, it 's Miss Minerva's house and she 's your aunt and we 's your company and you got to be 'sponsible."

"I can clam' down this here post," said the responsible party.

"I can climb down it, too," seconded Frances.

"You can't clam' down nothing at all," said Jimmy contemptuously. "Talk 'bout you can clam' down a post; you 'd fall and bust yourself wide open; you 'bout the clumsiest girl there is; 'sides, your legs 're too fat."

"We can holla," was Lina's suggestion.

"And have grown folks laughing fit to pop their sides open? I'm 'shamed to go anywhere now 'cause folks all time telling me when I'm going to dye some more Easter eggs! Naw, we better not holla," said Jimmy. "Ain't you going to do nothing, Billy?"

"I 'll jest slide down this here post and git the painter man to bring his ladder back. Y' all wait up here."

Billy's solution of the difficulty seemed the safest, and they were soon released from their elevated prison.

"I might as well go home and be learning the catechism," growled Lina.

"I'm going to get right in the closet soon 'I get to my house," said Frances. "Go on and put on your night-shirt, Billy."

Billy took himself to the bathroom and scrubbed and scrubbed; but the paint refused to come off. He tiptoed by the kitchen where his aunt was cooking dinner and ran into his own room.

He found the shoes and stockings which were reserved for Sunday wear, and soon had them upon his little feet.

Miss Minerva rang the dinner-bell and he walked quietly into the dining-room; trying to make as little noise as he could, and to attract as little attention from his aunt as possible; but she fastened her eyes at once upon his feet.

"What are you doing with your shoes on, William?" she asked.

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